

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
In opposition to the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget
March 6, 2015
Anthony Pierlioni

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

On December 22nd, 2013, Governor Malloy visited Common Ground, the clubhouse at InterCommunity in East Hartford, one of the best places on earth. He was there to tell our members that he believes in the need for mental health services and was dedicated to ensuring our people would be accounted for, since he had just proposed cuts to our budget. Two days later, the Sandy Hook Massacre occurred. Its aftermath brought on a flood of media attention, the vast majority of which was on gun control.

I grew up in a situation that was unhealthy compared to some others. My father suffered from undiagnosed mental health struggles and substance use, while my mother dealt with alcoholism. In elementary school, I often walked myself home from school, never seeing an adult all night, before putting myself to bed. My mother was incarcerated when I was in middle school. Thank goodness programs like SNAP and HUD were there to help us through those tough times, and keep us going when we needed it.

I went to therapy when throughout my childhood, and was a behavioral nightmare for teachers, as I acted out to get attention that I wasn't getting at home, at times. Thankfully, I had a great support system in the school system that stuck with me and wouldn't give up. It also helped that I grew to be 6'5" in eighth grade, and never had to act out in the same way. My grades got better, and I turned things around for myself.

I tried for years during my adolescence and young adulthood to help my parents with their demons. After becoming the first person in my family to attend college, after being recruited for basketball, I was able to help my mom go to school herself. She is now a Registered Nurse. My father, and lifelong best friend, was not so lucky. He died at the age of 56, which is the average for people with mental health concerns. He was a wonderful person who never was able to get the help that he needed.

My experience with my parents is what attracted me to the behavioral health field. The triumph of my mother's progress and tragedy of the loss of my father are constant reminders of the important fight ahead of us. Even with their faults, my parents sacrificed to give me the life I have today. In college I received the Scholar Athlete Award from the Rhode Island House of Representatives. Last month I received the John Avalone Award for my ability to inspire, support and empower growth in people. I'm nothing special, but it means a lot to me, knowing where I came from. None of this would have been possible without the state assistance that I received growing up in Connecticut.

These are accomplishments from a kid who could have easily been found dead at an early age, as well. I see now more than ever, how important these services are. Mental health services save lives and provide a safer place for us all to call home, a place where all people can have the right to pursue their own dreams. We need to realize that people are struggling with symptoms that can be made better with treatment, and opportunity. We can and are changing the world for the better every day. If anything, we need more funds to grow our positive outcomes.

There are people and services making tremendous strides in this stigma-induced darkness that seems to be overlooked far more than it is ever noticed. Let's keep real solutions in mind, when considering what to do about our states most far reaching issues.

Thank you.

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